

Alison's Branch Update

Alison Johnstone, Green MSP for Lothian

June 2014

Welcome to my latest update of the year.

This is a report to you, my Party colleagues, focusing on my work over the last few weeks. I hope that it gives you a flavour of how I try to ensure that your Green voices are being heard, both here in the Scottish Parliament and right the way across the Lothian region.



Parliamentary business

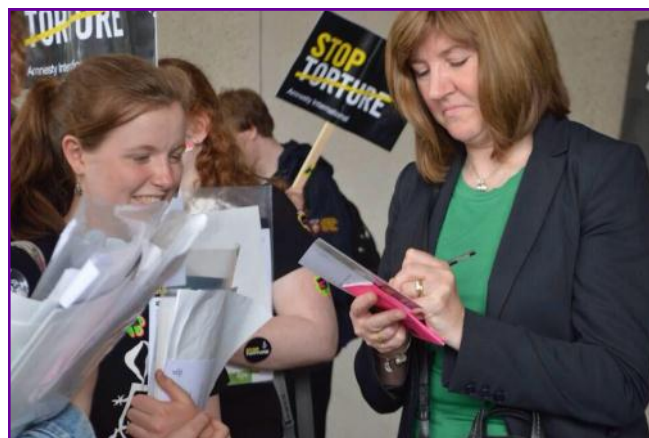
I lodged a motion this month welcoming the report, 'Below the Breadline: The Relentless Rise of Food Poverty in Britain', which was published by Oxfam, The Trussell Trust and Church Action on Poverty. The report makes for stark but essential reading, and I have called on the UK Government to change its sanctions regime, raise the minimum wage to the level of the living wage, and tackle zero-hours contracts.

Questions I asked in parliament recently have included: Two on business enterprise research and development spending (here and here); three on the issue of social care charges (here, here and here); one on electric shock collars for dogs; one on the Legacy 2014 programme; and two on safety reviews of nuclear facilities at Hunterston and Torness (here and here). I also asked the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment about farm subsidies.

Broughton High Walk Against Torture

As part of the wider Amnesty International campaign against torture, members of Broughton High School's Amnesty Youth Group staged a walk from the National Gallery to the parliament building to raise awareness of the plight of Moses Akatugba. Moses faces death by hanging in Nigeria, eight years after being convicted as a 16-year-old, and you can read about his case here.

The group were fundraising for Amnesty and carried petitions for members of the public to sign. I was happy to join the Youth Group to stand in solidarity for Moses and the countless others facing torture every day.



Eat Well Locally

I was delighted to launch Transition Edinburgh South's event, Eat Well Locally, featuring demonstrations, discussions and activities to encourage better practice in how we source our food.



Our relationship with food needs to see dedicated attention if we are to tackle food poverty, poor nutrition, and multinational domination of the supply chain, and I hope to see further initiatives that help us improve our food networks.

An emphasis on equal pay

In support of our ongoing work in parliament, including my role on the economy committee undertaking an inquiry into Scotland's economic future post-2014, Patrick and I commissioned a poll to gauge public attitudes towards measures we believe we need to see if Scotland is to create a fairer, more equal society.

In the event that responsibility for employment law comes to Scotland, 75.7% say they support private sector employers being compelled to ensure pay equality.

On average, women earn 13% less than men in full-time jobs, almost 34% less in part-time, and it is clear the strong desire exists to close this shameful gap.

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Recent media coverage

- Our poll on equal pay had good coverage on STV, the [Courier](#) and elsewhere.
- I commented on the latest [healthy food plan](#), the latest statistics on [PE in schools](#) and [big drinks companies](#) sponsoring the Glasgow games.
- My comments on the need for fracking buffer zones were widely quoted, including in The Times and the [Daily Record](#).
- With 100 days to go until the referendum, I [set out](#) the Green's plans to engage voters.
- I was mentioned on the Guardian's [bike blog](#) in a piece about women and cycling.

In Committee

The Economy Committee finished hearing evidence in our inquiry into Scotland's potential economic future following the Independence Referendum on 18 September 2014. The final session with Danny Alexander and Alistair Carmichael, followed by Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney, can be viewed online [here](#).

It was agreed that the Committee would not produce a formal report at the conclusion of the inquiry, but instead present all of the evidence and other aspects of the inquiry on the [website](#) for the public to access freely and form their own opinions.

The Committee also considered plans relating to the [Land Registration \(Scotland\) Act](#), with Energy Minister, Fergus Ewing MSP. The Official Report of the meeting is available to read on the Committee's [webpage](#).

Indyref panel discussions

Gracemount High School held a mock independence referendum, with a vote either side of a Question Time-style debate featuring myself and Kenny MacAskill for Yes, versus Ian Murray and Gavin Brown for No.

The result of the ballot pre-debate was: Yes 28%, No 45%, Don't Know 27%; and the result of the ballot post-debate was: Yes 56%, No 44%.

Great questions from the pupils made the debate productive, and we saw a very positive result for Yes.

Other independence-related engagements I took part in this month included speaking at a Third Sector Yes event at the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council; a debate at Dalkeith High School; and also a debate for Leith Academy pupils alongside fellow Green Party member, Dominic Hinde.



Speaking for Green Yes at Gracemount High

Events attended

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland marked five years since the Climate Change (Scotland) Act was passed, to reiterate that we in Scotland must do more to lead the way in finding solutions to the problems faced around the globe. The Scottish Parliament had a very different type of gathering recently, with MSPs and young people pitting their wits against each other and celebrating the opportunities on offer for learning in the outdoors.

One of the other events I attended saw 33 groups from all over the country taking part in Holyrood's first outdoor reception, organised by [YouthLink Scotland](#). This sector is an absolutely vital part of a young person's educational journey, and the showcase was a great success with many interactive, fun activities to try out.



Welcoming the batonbearers

I had the pleasure of welcoming batonbearer Lynne McNicoll to parliament earlier this month, with Scottish rugby legend Gavin Hastings. Lynne has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for children affected by cancer in the Edinburgh area through her charity - [It's Good 2 Give](#). Lynne passed the baton to Caitlin Osborne, who has completed a number of marathons for charity.

As we get ready to welcome visitors from around the world, it is an opportune time to highlight the work of those making a difference to people's lives in Scotland.